

Seoul chooses standard for wireless broadband access

THE KOREA HERALD

July 30, 2004, Friday

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Length: 517 words

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Body

The government has approved the IEEE 802.16 standard as Korea's base technology for portable wireless broadband access, the Ministry of Information and Communication said yesterday. Ministry officials also said the licensing for portable Internet businesses will be completed by February next year, but declined to confirm the number of licenses available.

"The review period for companies applying for WiBro business starts in December. The frequency access fees will be decided in October," said Kim Dong-soo, director of the ministry's Information Technology Policy Division.

"We will decide on the number of licenses after holding a public hearing in August," he added.

Companies will be required to develop solutions that provide connection speeds of 512Kbps for downloads and 128Kbps for uploads with the receiver device in motion up to a speed of 60 kilometers per hour. The government will also mandate that companies develop compatible equipment for roaming functions and build networks based on time division duplex technology.

Although the concept is still in its development stages, the portable Internet, named by Korean officials as WiBro (wireless broadband), is designed to provide high-speed access of a maximum 1Mbps to receiver devices moving at speeds of 60 to 70 kilometers per hour. The government aims for commercial services in 2006 and expects 10 million customers by 2008. The Communication Ministry allocated the 2.3Ghz band for portable Internet operations last February. The government had been planning to promote technologies developed by the Telecommunication Technology Association as the single industry standard for the portable Internet. However, the U.S. trade representative criticized the government's motives, saying it discriminates against U.S. chipmakers. Ministry officials said the trade dispute was not a considered factor in Thursday's decision on the standard.

"We haven't reached any agreement with the U.S. on the standard issue. The decision on the industry standard was based solely on technical efficiency," said Min Won-ki, director of the ministry's International Policy Division. The countries had a similar dispute in April, when U.S. officials opposed the government's plan to adopt wireless Internet platform for interoperability (WIPI) as a single industry standard for mobile-phone Internet access. The government backed away from its initial stance of forcing a single standard and allowed companies to use the binary runtime environment for wireless (BREW) platform developed by U.S. chipmaker Qualcomm.

The IEEE 802.16 is the standard for developing wireless broadband technologies such as WiMAX or Wi-Fi, designed to allow long-range and high-speed mobile Internet access on portable equipment. thkim@heraldm.com Intel Corp. announced last month that it would collaborate with software maker Proxim Corp. to develop WiMAX solutions based on IEEE 802.16 for both fixed-line and portable broadband access. Intel plans to bring its first WiMAX chipsets for use in laptop computers to market by 2006. (thkim@heraldm.com)

Load-Date: July 29, 2004